

MEDIA INFORMATION

DATE: 09 OCTOBER 2007

Charging or choice?

Transport Minister Rt Hon Rosie Winterton MP will head a strong list of speakers at a regional conference - **Charging or Choice?** - in Leicester on Tuesday 16th October.

Hosted by TravelWatch East Midlands, the independent body promoting passenger transport in the region, the conference will examine the problem of road congestion and how it can be resolved.

“Most public reaction so far has focused upon the congestion charge but we wish to address the bigger picture and this conference will hopefully widen the debate,” said TravelWatch East Midlands’ chairman Alan Meredith.

“Road pricing may have a role to play, but can be only part of a solution for revolutionising transport infrastructure, minimising the problems caused by congestion, improving road safety, and supporting urban regeneration.

“In particular, we are concerned that politicians don’t just pay lip service to the need for fast and efficient public transport, but take steps to make it a reality.

“What is needed is not just charging, but a real choice for travellers, with good reliable information to make that choice,” he said.

A call to remove barriers to rail travel

A recent TravelWatch survey of East Midlands rail users (full details of which will be given at the conference) revealed dissatisfaction with the access to rail stations.

Often:

- Bus services are poor, badly signposted with inadequate information.
- Station car parks are full, despite being overpriced.
- Cycle storage is badly planned and not secure.
- Access on foot is inconvenient and sometimes potentially dangerous.

TravelWatch East Midlands' rail correspondent Steve Abbott said: "Rail and bus operators need to operate in a joined up manner, providing good connections, with information and help when there are delays."

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Notes for Editors:

1. The Conference - Charging or Choice? - will address the likely impact of congestion charging and the extent to which public transport can be a real alternative to the car.

Venue: The VAL Centre, Newarke Street, Leicester
Time: 10am until 4pm on Tuesday 16th October 2007
2. Media representatives are welcome, subject to prior arrangements, and it is expected that there can be a photo-call with the Minister and key speakers around 1.30pm.
3. The Rail Station survey was conducted for a full day in August at Derby, Leicester, Loughborough, Lincoln and Market Harborough stations.
4. TravelWatch East Midlands is an alliance of groups representing the consumer interest across all modes of public transport. The organisation's aim is to represent the interests and concerns of public transport passengers across all forms of transport and to assist local and regional authorities' work towards an integrated and seamless quality public transport network for the East Midlands region.
5. TravelWatch East Midlands' mission is to champion public transport so that it becomes:
 - Accessible to everyone - including the mobility impaired
 - Affordable and socially inclusive
 - Available when and where needed
 - Acceptable to all, whatever mode is chosen
 - Attractive - with high quality of services and reliable information
6. By bringing together for the first time within a single body, representative groups of bus, rail, light rail, air and other passengers, TravelWatch East Midlands offers passengers a new opportunity for strong consumer representation and to regional policy makers a route to engage with transport consumers on an integrated basis throughout the region.
7. The organisation's website is www.travelwatcheastmidlands.org.uk/
8. For further information contact Alan Meredith on 0116 2303895 (Chairman) or Steve Abbott on 01858 466629 (Secretary) OR use the "Contact Us" page on the web site.